

**Report: Burmese Army Continues Rights Violations in Karen
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As Burma's government and ethnic Karen rebel groups continue peace talks to end one of the world's longest running conflicts, there are renewed reports of human rights violations by the Burmese army in the volatile state.

A new report by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) found that a third of the families in the region reported experiencing abuses, such as evictions, forced labor, restricted movement and sometimes physical attacks, including rape and torture.

The report released Tuesday suggests those living near economic development projects such as mines, pipelines and hydroelectric dams are significantly more likely to become victims of land rights and labor abuses.

The report comes just weeks after the United States took steps to ease bans on investment and financial services to Burma – a move that has been criticized by some rights groups.

PHR Burma Director Bill Davis says that Washington should take greater precautions to ensure that new U.S. investment does not support those linked to rights abuses.

“We've heard a lot of American government sources saying 'Well our companies are different than the companies that have been working (in Burma), different from Chinese companies. Our companies care about human rights.' And maybe they do. But a major problem is that in Karen state and in a lot other ethnic areas in Burma, foreign companies often partner with the Burmese military to implement projects.”

Western nations have demanded peace with rebel groups, including the Karen, as a condition for easing political and economic sanctions against the rapidly reforming country. But clashes continue, despite a series of cease-fire deals earlier this year.

In January, the government signed a preliminary cease-fire with the Karen National Union, one of the country's largest rebel groups. But the latest round of peace talks was called off by the government this week. The talks were set to discuss the sensitive issue of a troop withdrawal.

Although major offensives in Karen state have decreased in recent months, Burma's military still maintains a large troop presence in the state. Analysts say that any withdrawal would be a major challenge for the struggling peace process.

But PHR warns that a cease-fire agreement, while positive, will not necessarily lead to an end of abuses against civilians. It is calling on the government to hold human rights violators accountable and take steps to implement further political and judicial reforms.

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